

*Commissioners give go-ahead for \$4.2M corrections center

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The Sullivan County Commissioners gave the green light for the proposed construction of a \$4.2 million community corrections center and an additional \$1.5 million for Newport upgrades to the jail that will now be brought before the delegation.

"You certainly have my support on this package as a whole," commission-

er Jeff Barrette said during a special meeting Friday morning.

The unanimous vote allows jail superintendent Ross Cunningham and acting county manager Greg Chanis to bring the \$5.7 million package before the executive finance committee and the full delegation for approval.

If approved, Cunningham expects to begin the upgrades in July and start design work on the center in August. Construction is scheduled to commence in April 2009, with a projected

completion date in June 2010.

The jail was built in 1978 and designed to house 44 inmates, according to Cunningham. There are currently twice as many people housed at the facility.

"It is a very well-built building that just has some issues," Chanis said.

Upgrades to the jail include a new roof and insulation, a fire sprinkler system, a new security system and an overhaul of the heating and air condi-

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tioning system.

"All of the air handling equipment is 35 to 40 years old," Chanis said. "It's antiquated."

Cunningham said that proper venting would also be installed in the bathrooms, which would alleviate possible health issues.

"Steam from the showers is causing mold on the ceiling," Cunningham said. "It's a monthly project to clean it."

The proposed 10,000-square-foot corrections center would be built near the existing jail and provide treatment and transitional services for inmates and help ease overcrowding.

The entire project will be put out for bid, according to the commission. Barrette and commissioner Ethel Jarvis said they would like to use contractors from Sullivan County.

"I'm confident it will be a competitive environment for projects, both big and small," Chanis said.

To staff the new center, Cunningham said he will need to hire six additional officers at an annual cost of \$420,000.

Chanis said he would prefer to finance the project with a loan as opposed to a traditional bond.

"My recommendation is financing through a bank and not getting a bond," Chanis said.

Chanis gave the commission the example of a \$5 million loan at 4.5 percent interest that would cost the county about \$1.6 million in interest over a 10-year period.

He said that the new facility and upgrades would be sufficient to house prisoners past the loan period.

"This will give us a lot of time," Chanis said. "Certainly more than 10 years."

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